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EUGENICS OF THE NEGRO RACE

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THE problem of *eugenics* is receiving much attention from students of sociology at the present time. The future welfare of society depends very largely upon perpetuating and carrying forward the best characteristics derivable from physical heredity and social environment. The application of eugenics to the colored race of the United States suggests several new and interesting lines of inquiry.

A study of the number of children, contributed by the fifty-five colored teachers in Howard University, Washington, D. C., throws an interesting sidelight on the question of eugenics as it affects the negro race. Howard University is an institution for the higher education of the negro, comprising a student body of over fifteen hundred. The negro members of the faculty maintain, on the whole, perhaps, a status as high as any other group of colored people to be found in the United States. The present study is limited to the teachers of the academic faculties, as they constitute a coherent social entity, whose life focuses about the institution.

As outgrowth of sudden change of condition due to the Civil War, the negro has developed a small upper class with a wide fissure between it and the great mass life of the race. There are about fifty thousand negroes belonging to the professional class, who earn a livelihood by some form of intellectual endeavor; while the great bulk of the race lives mainly by manual exertion. All social stratification rests ultimately upon occupation. The negro has no considerable middle class, such as is found in well-regulated societies, which shades imperceptibly in both directions. According to the occupational test, the demarcation between the professional and laboring classes of the negro is as sharp as a knife-cut line.

It becomes a matter of sociological interest to know how far this upper class is self-sustaining through its own reproductivity. I have therefore undertaken to make a study of race eugenics in so far as this particular group is concerned. In the fifty-five families from which these teachers were derived, there were 363 children, or an average of 6.5 for each family. On the other hand, these fifty-five teachers who have passed from the lower to the upper section of negro life, have, so far, contributed

only 37 children, or an average of .7 for each potential family involved. Of this number there are 41 males, 14 females; 22 are married, and 33 are single; the number of children for each family so far formed is 1.6; the largest number of children in any family is 6; four of the families are barren and four have one child each. The average age of the single members is over 32 years. This strongly indicates that the upward struggle defers the age of marriage to a time when only limited progeny might be expected. Considering all the probabilities in the case, it seems to me entirely likely that these fifty-five potential families, when the whole record is in, will not produce more than an average of two children to each family, while the fifty-five parent families, under the old régime, gave rise to 363 children. The new issue will scarcely produce sufficient progeny to perpetuate its own numbers.

There is always a certain sort of social restraint, in the case of an individual advancing from a lower to a higher level of life. The first descendants of foreigners in this country have a lower birth rate than any other element of our population. The intolerant social environment created by the white race may also produce a strong deterrent influence. Animals, in captivity or under restrained environment, do not breed as freely as when placed under free and normal surroundings. The educated negro, especially when submerged in a white environment, is under a sort of social captivity. The effect of this psychophysical factor upon reproductivity awaits further and fuller study, both in its biological and psychological aspects.

From a wide acquaintance with the upper life of the negro race, under wide variety of conditions and circumstances, I am fully persuaded that this Howard University group is typical of like element throughout the race so far as fecundity is concerned. The upper class is headed towards extinction, unless reinforced from the fruitful mass below. It is doubtless true that the same restraining influence is exerted upon the corresponding element of the white race. But as there is not the same sharpness of separation between the social levels, nor such severe transitional struggle, the contributing causes do not perhaps operate with the same degree of intensity.

The prolonged period of education delays the age of marriage. The negro during the first generation of freedom acquired his education at a later period than the white children and by reason of the hard struggle he has had to undergo, his scholastic training was completed at a somewhat advanced age. The high standard of living, which the professional negro feels he must maintain, still further delays the age of marriage. A

single illustration will serve to clarify this point. I half-jocularly asked one of our bachelor instructors, who has passed beyond his fortieth birthday, why he did not take unto himself a companion and help-mate. His reply was that his salary was not sufficient to allow him to support a family in the style and manner which he deemed appropriate. My reply was: "If your parents had been constrained by like consideration, you would probably not be in existence." His father was a laboring man with a family of eight children. It was the opinion of Grant Allen, the eminent English literary and scientific authority, that the human race would become extinct if all females deferred marriage beyond the age of twenty-six.

The conscious purpose of race suicide doubtless contributes somewhat to the low birth rate. There are some of sensitive and timid spirit who shirk the responsibility of parenthood, because they do not wish to bring into the world children to be subjected to the proscription and obloquy of the negro's social status.

Will this tendency, which threatens the extinction of the higher element of the negro race, continue to operate in the future with the same degree of intensity as at the present time? Probably not. The first generation after slavery was subjected to the severe strain and stress of rapid readjustment. The sudden leap from the lower to the upper levels of life was a feat of social acrobatics that can hardly be repeated under more orderly scheme of development. The life of subsequent generations will be better ordered, and therefore we may expect that the resulting effect will be seen in the family life. The birth rate of the mass of the race is not affected by like considerations. They feel little or nothing of the stress and strain of the upper class, and multiply and make merry, in blissful oblivion of these things. The rate of increase of the upper class is scarcely a third of that of the bulk of the race, as is clearly indicated by the relative prolificness of the Howard University faculty as compared with that of their parents. The higher or professional class in the negro race will not be recruited from within its own ranks, but must be reinforced from the great mass below. This will produce healthy current throughout the race which will serve somewhat to bridge the chasm produced by the absence of a mediatory class.

The whole question suggests the importance of a more careful and extended study in this field of inquiry which is as fruitful as any other in its far-reaching effect upon the general social welfare.